



Balloon fun!



Our lovely new Sinhala teacher



Little Vinoj, fully recovered visited us with his happy parents

Dear Friends,

I am writing this in my house in Devon, England with 20 cms of snow and minus 8c degrees outside. It is hard to imagine the 35c I left behind two weeks ago in Sri Lanka.

This newsletter is an opportunity to tell you about Star Action's most recent activities, all of which have been made possible by your generous donations.

In Ghana, by the time you read this, we expect to have placed our Youth Training Centre in Asiakwa into the hands of a well-known local school headteacher and his school which educates many of the poor children from the town. All our other activities in recent months have been spread across the Indian Sub-continent in Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

You may remember we launched a new crop – groundnuts (peanuts) – along the coast of Eastern Sri Lanka where the tsunami wave had deposited a layer of sand on the land. This provides much-needed protein into the local diet. Now we have a plan to pasteurise and introduce goats milk. Mysteriously this is seldom consumed in India and Sri Lanka, whereas it is a vital food in many other countries. Maybe you would like to support our research and establishment of this venture.

Stuart

For Joan, Kate and Jenny

Star Action Trustees



School at Vakaneri

INDIA

It was such a joy to arrive at our Bright Life Home—after two years not there—to see the wonderful way in which the garden had matured. The photos show the beautiful fruit trees at the front of the house and the paved area which is ideal for visitors to relax and the children play. Once a month our little ones



from the Manjolai tea plantations have a visit from their parents and this provides a lovely area for them to relax and be with the children. At the back of the house the fruit trees have grown well too; this is where washing is done and our hens can roam free. It is a beautiful family home and a delight to see how happy all the children are.

SUCCESS FOR THE OLDER ONES

Velammal

As we have told you previously, Velammal has been progressing brilliantly with her nursing courses and is now a fully trained eye nurse. She has nearly completed her acupuncture training. Whilst staying there, Stuart and I both enjoyed acupuncture treatments from her as she is required to get as much practice as possible. She is doing really well.



Rani

Rani came to our home as a skinny little teenager suffering badly from TB. Sasees and Richard gave her wonderful care and she has

been embraced in the happy family life. Over the years Sasees has taught her many house-keeping skills, including cooking, and she now looks after everyone—washing, ironing, cleaning, cooking—and is so much loved by us all. Well done, dear Rani.

Marcus

Marcus has been with us since birth and is now nearly 18 and taking his final exams before going on to study at college. He is expected to do well and is keen to study pharmaceutical medicine, with plans to find work in a pharmacy or laboratory later.

Marcus has grown into a fine young man and is really helpful in the Home and in looking after some of the younger boys.

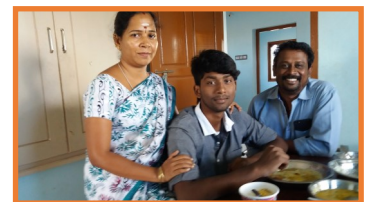


Muthu

Muthu is a tall and very likeable lad. He is effectively an orphan, having been mistreated by several members of his family. He is practical rather than academic and, when he finishes school in April, we hope he will stay on as Richard's right-hand man and maintenance assistant.

Kirthick

Kirthick is in the first year (of 5) at the State's principal Law School in Chennai.



His ambition is to return to Tirunelveli to practice law and also help the Children's Home.

Senior Boys

Several of those over 14 years are playing badminton at a local club and doing well, with a recent supply of racquets and shuttlecocks sent by a kind supporter.

SRI LANKA

TWO NEW VILLAGES - VAKANERI & KUDAMUMAKAL

Once again Lal had identified more poverty stricken villages where our help was needed. This time we were been asked to visit nursery schools in these villages and maybe, if we could, help with new playground equipment. We were told the story of previous NGO vis-



Lal at Nursery school looking at gourd made by the children

its which had not been followed up as promised. This is an area that has been terribly damaged by the civil war, and after the rebel troops had withdrawn, by herds of wandering wild elephants. The elephants had

damaged many of the empty houses so when the fleeing families returned they found broken down walls and windows. A few repairs have been done, but some people were left desolate. The requests we received were not just for the nursery schools but also to help repair some of the damaged houses.

On this visit we looked at 44 different projects (some new, some following up existing ones). In every case we have to assess whether we can go ahead there and then and promise the help, or come back to you, our wonderful supporters, to ask if you are interested in helping with a specific project. So now we ask for anyone who would like to donate towards playground equipment for one of the two nursery schools to let us know, and also anyone wanting to give help in repairing a broken down house, so a family can live in comfort. Thank you.

A NEW FISHING COMMUNITY PROJECT NEEDING OUR HELP



Fishermen at Vakaneri

Also in the village of Vakaneri we met Mr. Kanawadipulla Kasinaran, the 39 year old secretary of the very active Fishermen's Society. This consists of 130 fishermen who work in a successful co-operative. This is set up with government help, so that the lake/lagoon is regularly re-stocked. Apparently there are 15 different types of fish and prawns, and the fishermen each pay 20 rupees each time they fish into the society funds. This money is then used to re-stock the lagoon to keep it sustainable. We were very impressed with the way the system is working, which is providing a good livelihood for the hardworking fishermen. Their request to us was for help to provide a shelter (both from the sun and rain) where they can sort their catch and prepare their nets. There is already an old foundation from a previous shelter but nothing more. We would love to do this and need £740

A VERY ENTERPRISING FARMER

Also in Vakaneri we met our enterprising farmer, Tiagarasa Naratnam. We were very impressed with this man who, in spite of the great difficulty of having a mentally sick wife whilst two of his three daughters have learning difficulties is making the best of his life. He has a good area (15 perches) of land around his little



house and his request to us was for a fence to keep out wandering animals, so that he can make a success of growing his ground nuts, papaya and other fruit and vegetables. He has managed to get a pump for necessary watering of his land, but is unable to manage the expense of a fence. The cost will be £250

NEW NURSERY SCHOOL TO HELP IN SILVAPURAM

(a little village near Kayankerny)

Lal took us to visit another nursery school in the little village of Silvapuram, just adjacent to Kayankerny where he lives. We met the school caretaker, Thavarasa, and the two very bright teachers, Silodani and Pushpalata (I love some of their names) who are keen for our help in setting up mid-morning lunches for the 35 children attending.



They have a very good plan for the daily meals. One of the teachers will do all the shopping and the parents will do all the cooking in the nicely equipped kitchen. (This nursery school was built by the NGO SOS and is in a good state of repair.) The menu for food is:

Monday –	Eggs and Rice
Tuesday –	Green beans
Wednesday –	Vegetables, Rice and Coconut Milk
Thursday –	Chick Pea Curry
Friday –	Milk Rice

We liked these bright ladies and really want to help them. The cost works out at less than the

lunches we were providing at Muruthana. (We have completed our help there as the government has sent an agent there to oversee the village. It was the main centre for the Tamil Tiger rebels in days gone by.) We are happy with what we have accomplished and glad that our limited resources can now be used in other villages which do not have any government intervention/assistance.

SINHALA TEACHING PROJECT UPDATE

The amazing good news is that we now have 150+ children benefiting from our growing Sinhala Teaching Project. From a small beginning—just one lady, Amudha in Lal's village of Kayankerny teaching a few children in her home (she now has an extension which was crowded with over 40 children on our recent visit)—we have 6 more teachers in other villages, the latest being Mala in Kudamumakal, who teaches in the Nursery School (earlier request for playground equipment.) We found that she is fluent in Sinhala and very willing to have the extra job of after school Sinhala classes and a class of older children.



New Sinhala teacherMala on right.

The Buddhist school at Mylankarachai we visited last February with Richard and Sasees is going from strength to strength, with 60 children attending. They are divided into two groups with the younger ones with two teachers, Kanthilatha and Sulakshmi, and the older children with formidable Sisili Perera—a very well organised older lady who was outspoken in her requests for books, pens and other teaching material! All our teachers are paid 5,000 rupees a month (£25) and are happy that their salaries are secure (quite unlike government paid teachers in this area who find that often their salaries remain unpaid for

many months). We particularly love this Buddhist school which is right next to the Buddhist Temple and there is a most beautiful aura of peace and healing pervading this whole village.



Happy pupils in Sinhala class at Buddhist school

Nirojini (see photo on page 1) has a new group along the coast in Ooriankadu and Rokshana is now using her own home to teach after school Sinhala in Mankerni. Rokshana also has two assistants, who help the 42 children of varied ages with problem homework from school.

It is so good to realise that all these children—and many more to come—will benefit from the opportunity to learn the main language of their country, not just Tamil, which is spoken only in the North and Eastern Provinces and severely limits future job opportunities.

WONDERFUL NEWS ABOUT

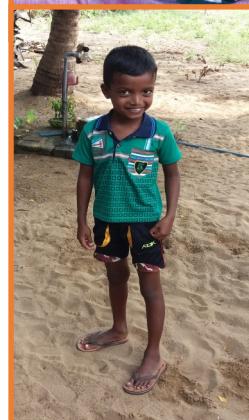
JUWADIKA (Jenny writes)



Juwadika

One of our first visits on our arrival in Valachenai was to see how our little non-walking Juwadika is getting on. Our wonderful and dedicated Star Action 'Star' Rohan (whose home is in Colombo), had

arranged three trips to Colombo for little Juwadika and her mother. He made sure they had every comfort in the long distance buses, special facilities for them and personally meeting them and taking them to their accommodation and then to specialist doctors where he had arranged appointments. Although the doctors still do not really know what has caused the problem, the wonderful thing is that when we arrived Juwadika was taking a few faltering steps and then taking my hands she walked the length of her driveway and back with great determination and joy, and no longer in the pain she had felt on our previous visit. I personally believe that not only the medical treatment but the prayers of many people who have read her story have been helping what seems to be a miracle to take place. She has another visit arranged to the specialist paediatrician in Colombo and we are confident that her walking will continue to improve as her little leg muscles get used to exercise. We would employ a physiotherapist but the nearest lives over 50 miles away.



LITTLE VINOJ

Another delight was the visit of little Vinoj with his parents to Lal's house while we were there, so we could see how well he has recovered from his leg injury. No problem now with his walking! As usual,

whilst with Lal the word had gone round the whole area that we were there and we had a queue of people waiting to see if there was any way we could help them.



ENCOURAGING TEENAGE GIRLS IN EDUCATION

Longing to get ahead with their studies Davnilla (12) and Suwandika (10) came alone to see us to ask for school bags, books and pens. We went to the shop in nearby Valacheni and bought the items (£17) for these conscientious girls from a poor home (see photograph)



Our trainee nurses are fine : well, two of them are continuing! However, one has been married instead! (Always a problem in this part of the world where a career—as an alternative to an early arranged marriage—is still unusual for teenage girls.) The remaining two are working their qualification year in St. Joseph's Hospital.

Kandia Wimela (whom we have previously helped in a number of ways) requested assistance in paying for bus fares to Valacheni, so her older daughter Venusika can continue her higher level studies. (We would love to help with this to avoid an early marriage for her too and give her a glimpse of independence). (£10 per school month)



Shakeenah is no longer a teenager and, supported by several of you, is in the third year of an MBBS training at a Medical College in Chittagong, Bangladesh.

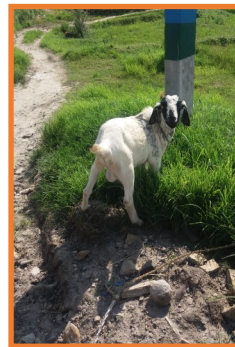
She has ambitious plans to complete her training and specialise

in gynaecology.

THISONAYAGAM

Thiso, the son of a poor fisherman, is enjoying a 'scholarship' donated by two friends of Star Action who are keen to promote further education on the Island.

He is halfway through his Business Study Course at Jaffna University and made a 16 hour round trip on the bus to meet us in February. We would have discouraged this if we had realised that he had two weeks of exams beginning the next day!



A happy Star Action goat!

"GOATHERDS"

Our goat project is going ahead really well with six very poor families now benefitting. Each of the recipients of two female goats suffers from a physical disability preventing her/him from being able to hold down a good job.

Lilawathi is the star amongst our new goat owners. (She has only one arm, husband killed in the war, 2 children). Each time we visit she is missing; out in the scrub grass grazing her (now 10) goats – there were 12 but she has sold two.

She has built a pen (larger than the last one we saw) to keep them in overnight.

Konaka Shapula

(severely damaged shoulder. She is the only survivor of 7 men and women ambushed during the Civil War). Amazingly she is managing with the help of her son. Now has 5 goats.

Nessama (she also has only one arm – no children) she made us laugh when we heard



that there is a local custom that, whenever a child is born, the family give sweets to children living nearby. Nessama was so delighted when her goat's first kid was born that she bought sweets for everyone too.

Sellokumar (lost a leg from a personnel mine). He has been trying to fish for crabs to help feed his family. The two goats he is receiving this month will help a little towards that constant challenge.

Next time we shall catch up with the other two goatherds.

HOUSE CONSTRUCTION

As a rather ancient servant of NGOs (Non-Government Organisations) in post-crisis zones around the world it has made me sad to discover an estate of 9 year old houses, built post tsunami, that have become dangerous and, in some cases, uninhabitable through the use of sub-standard building materials. The internationally respected NGO has either failed to check the buildings during construction and a local builder has made a substantial profit, or they have employed a poor architect/designer. Which-ever it is, we were only just in time to avoid a tragedy in 2017, discovering 12 houses with roofs comprising a network of wooden rafters and purlins that were half the size needed to support the heavy clay tiles above. Some had collapsed and others were poised to fall on the occupants below. The prompt donation of a considerable sum of money by two generous friends of Star Action, both of whom have visited our projects in Sri Lanka, enabled us to evacuate the occupants and repair the roofs.

This year we have found another two homes in need of attention. I have written one of my 'special' letters to the NGO concerned, demanding something towards our costs.



Broken down home of
new born baby

LAL

Lal, our trusty helper in eastern Sri Lanka, earns his living as a diver. He is highly regarded and in demand for all sorts of engineering projects underwater anywhere in Sri Lanka. He lost his well-established business when the Tamil Tigers captured his team of workers during the Civil War and Lal surrendered all his equipment and boats to secure their release.

Lal acts as our ears and eyes in this area for most of the year, bringing needy people to our notice, and using our transferred money to pay for our approved projects and monthly salaries or gifts to the teachers and others we manage to help.

In 2007 Lal led our Star Action scheme, in conjunction with the French Charity Solidaritee, to clear the sea bed beyond the beaches of the debris dragged into the water by the Tsunami Wave of 2004; thereby freeing the area for the fishing community.

Now Lal is principal in rebuilding the coral reef that ran parallel to the coast.

With small concrete oases (similar in size and design to those used in flower arrangements) that are cast with holes in them, he places these with vegetation attached on the sea bed to encourage new coral polyps to grow and build a new reef. In time these will be the breeding grounds and hiding places for many types of fish and other sealife.

Although coral covers less than 1% of the sea floor it is the home of more than 25% of our fish population around the world. This conservation will prove to be more valuable as global sea warming in certain areas is killing much of the established coral.



GHANA

With much capable help from our Star Action stalwarts, Hamida and Frederick Bote-Kwame, Star Action has decided to lease the Youth Training Building on the outskirts of Asiakwa to a school of 90 pupils.

The accompanying land will be used as playground and sports field.

The owner and Headteacher, Samuel Asamoah is also Pastor of a local Christian Church in the town. He runs the school on a 'shoestring' and his ambitions for the children are similar to ours at our children's homes and schools. He already numbers amongst his pupils many who can only afford to pay half fees, and he has agreed to include more from poor families on free scholarships. This will be helped by Star Action charging a rental of 1 Ghana Cedi per annum (about 17 pence Sterling).

Hyper-efficient Hamida is finalising the legalities as I write, and these will include representation on the School's Board of Management by herself and another good friend of Star Action, a retired International Architect who is a respected Elder of Asiakwa and who will safeguard our interests and closely monitor the quality of the children's education.



NEPAL



Haven on Earth student giving Star Action gift to Tokha blind lady

Keshav Adhikari, our hardworking representative in Kathmandu has used the donations you made and requested to go to Nepal at the end of last year to continue to help keep the 130

residents of the Tokha Centre for the Blind fed and warm during the winter.

Bir Laxmi Shrestha was glad of your help towards her kidney dialysis treatment and we now have hopes that this will be underwritten by the Nepal Government Health Dept. in the near future.

The Haven on Earth Children's Home continues to thrive and some of you now sponsor a poor child there, who would have little chance of a family home or of a good education in the remote hinterland villages.

The Panchakoshi School, Pokhara urgently needs furniture and books after it suffered badly in the 2015 earthquakes and the house is so badly damaged that the owning family have had to live crowded into



Panchakoshi School, Pokhara

a relative's house for almost 3 years, whilst hoping someone will help them repair their home.

FUTURE GOATS MILK PROJECT



Let's turn India into a Nanny state!

The milk and cheese that can be produced from goats after the kids have been weaned has the potential of aiding poverty relief in some of the regions in which we are working. Goats milk is processed commercially extensively in The Netherlands, France and Spain and both the milk and cheese are prominent in the economies of Greece and Turkey. Mexico also leads the way in Central America.



Goats are the most common dairy animal in Sri Lanka and South India, yet the kids are not weaned from the mother at all. We have only managed to identify one venture in Sri Lanka and one in South India that are producing small quantities of the milk for drinking and none for cheese. Each is a long way from our districts of concentration, 400 miles in the case of India and the company produces only for the medical market.

There appears to be no superstition attached

to drinking goat's milk and we have spoken to many who have, usually as children, tasted and liked the product.

We need to research this in depth, explore breeds of goat, investigate established producers in other countries, discuss with veterinary practitioners and, if appropriate, establish a small prototype dairy business that would lead to educate local people to add it to their diet.

This could be an exciting, if experimental scheme. It would be good to have your support at this early stage, both financial and advisory.

GIVE AS YOU LIVE—NEW FUNDRAISING

Please consider signing up for this new way to support Star Action. Just sign on at the link below and we will receive a donation every time you shop at one of the participating stores!

<https://www.giveasyoulive.com/join/star-action>



Sellokumar. Struggling disabled goatherd.



Jenny visiting one of Star Action's Sinhala schools



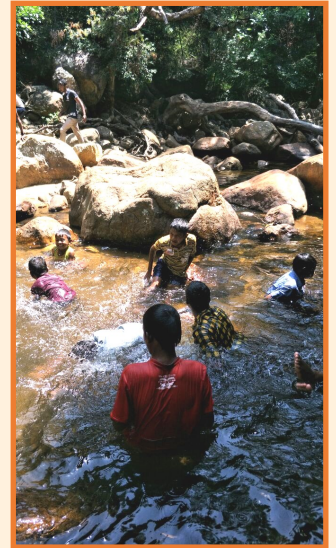
Kanawadipulla Kasinanan,
secretary of the
Fishermen's Society



Fruit & flowers in the
garden of 'Katie Neil
House'.



Anujith - from the Manjolai
Tea Plantations, now going
to school with us



Our children swimming in
one of the rivers from the
Cardomom Hills



Kandia's elder daughter
Venusika continues her
studies



Anujith and friends



Thushani - war orphan
studying hard at school
and Sinhala with us'